

Romantic Survivors: *Rosa spinosissima*, Scots Roses and the North American connection

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"I took a slip of the little white Scotch rose-bush his mother brought out from Scotland long ago; Matthew always liked those roses the best - they were so small and sweet on their thorny stems. It made me feel glad that I could plant it by his grave - as if I were doing something that must please him in taking it there to be near him. I hope he has roses like them in heaven. Perhaps the souls of all those little white roses that he has loved so many summers were all there to meet him".

From *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) by Lucy Maud Montgomery.



One of the Double White Scots Roses with semi-double globular white flowers - probably the type referred to by Lucy Maud Montgomery

Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942) came from a long line of Scots-Canadians. The affection for Scots Roses that she reflected in her well-known novel, written one hundred years ago on Prince Edward Island in Canada, was a common sentiment among immigrants from Scotland and one that she had no doubt experienced in her

own family. Scots families took Scots Roses - Scotch Roses as they were known then - with them to Canada, the United States and many other parts of the world in the 19th century. However, although the Scots and expatriate Scots in other countries played a significant part in the story of these roses, they were not alone in their love of them.

The true Scots Roses are cultivars of *Rosa spinosissima* (syn. *R. pimpinellifolia*) and some hybrids of the species that have similar character. They are sometimes known as Spinosissimas or Pimpinellifolias. However, these terms are often used to include hybrids of *R. spinosissima* that are not what I regard as typical Scots Roses. The term Hybrid Spinosissimas, as used in the United States, is also misleading because not all Spinosissimas are hybrids. The term Pimpinellifolias is sometimes used in an even broader sense to embrace other species within the section Pimpinellifoliae (e.g., *R. ecae*, *R. foetida*, *R. hugonis*, *R. primula*, *R. sericea* and *R. xanthina*).

At first, Linnaeus described *R. spinosissima* and *R. pimpinellifolia* as two different species but later changed his mind. Others continued to separate *R. spinosissima* and *R. pimpinellifolia* into separate species while some made one a variety of the other. The main distinguishing characteristic thought to separate the two was the presence or absence of stiff hairs on the pedicels (the stalks of the flowers or fruits). The pedicels of *R. spinosissima* were determined to have stiff hairs while the pedicels of *R. pimpinellifolia* or *R. spinosissima* var. *pimpinellifolia* were smooth. Molecular studies on specimens from wild populations in Britain by Dr. Volker Wissemann have proved that specimens attributed to *R. spinosissima* and *R. pimpinellifolia* belong to one species. As Linnaeus used the name *R. spinosissima* before *R. pimpinellifolia*, it has priority.

Sometimes, Scots Roses are still referred to as Scotch Roses but the adjective 'Scotch' is not favoured in Scotland and should only be applied to whisky! I prefer the term Scots Rose in its capitalised version, as used here. In my view, "Scots rose" with a small "r" is ambiguous and might be applied to any rose growing in or associated with Scotland. "Scottish Roses" is also ambiguous. Other common names for the species include **Burnet Rose** because of the resemblance of the leaves to those of Burnets (*Sanguisorba* species) and **Dune Rose** or **Burrows Rose** because, in Western Europe, *R. spinosissima* is commonly found on coastal sand dunes for which the old English name is 'burrows'.



**Wild *Rosa spinosissima* in Britain usually has white flowers
but the shape of the flowers is variable**

What are Scots Roses?

Traditionally, varieties of Scots Rose were considered a product of "spontaneous generation" from the native *R. spinosissima*. However, according to contemporary reports, most of the early 19th century nurseries raised new varieties of Scots Roses from the seed of open-pollinated plants, relying on bees to carry pollen between existing varieties planted in close proximity to each other.

In modern times, several natural hybrids between *R. spinosissima* and other native British species have been identified:

R. x cantiana = *R. spinosissima* x *R. rubiginosa*

R. x coronata = *R. spinosissima* x *R. tomentosa*

R. x hibernica = *R. spinosissima* x *R. canina*

R. x involuta = *R. spinosissima* x *R. sherardii*

R. x magerisonii = *R. spinosissima* x *R. caesia*

R. x sabinii = *R. spinosissima* x *R. mollis*

Some of these natural hybrids of *R. spinosissima* were treated as separate species in the early 19th century. Reciprocal hybrids may be given the same name but the genes of *R. spinosissima* are diluted to different extents where hybrids with members of the Class Caninae (such as *R. canina* itself) are involved.

Such hybrids probably contributed colour (pink and red) to some of the early varieties of Scots Roses through accidental hybridization in the wild or in cultivation. However, some non-native species had been cultivated in British gardens for centuries. *Rosa foetida* and *R. pendulina*, like *R. spinosissima*, flower early in the year. Other early flowering roses, such as *R. ecae*, *R. hugonis* and *R. xanthina*, that

could be involved in accidental hybrids today were not introduced to Europe until the end of the 19th century or early 20th century. *Rosa foetida* (yellow flowers) and *R. pendulina* (red flowers) undoubtedly contributed to the colour and genetic make-up of several varieties, either as first generation hybrids or seedlings of such hybrids. In fact, because of their flowering time and their cultivation in gardens and nurseries, they were possibly more likely to hybridize with *R. spinosissima* than with native species.

Simple hybrids between *R. spinosissima* and another species may betray their hybrid origin through larger leaves on taller, more upright and less prickly stems, elongated reddish fruits instead of the typical rounded black ones, or a scent unlike that of *R. spinosissima*. While some hybrids resemble one parent, other plants of the same parentage may resemble the other. Complex hybrids may have *R. spinosissima* characteristics diluted to varying extents.

***Rosa spinosissima* as a wild species and a parent of hybrids**

R. spinosissima is said to be the rose with the widest natural global distribution of any rose species. It occurs naturally over a large part of Europe and Asia. In Britain, it is probably most abundant as a coastal plant growing on sand dunes because many inland habitats have been destroyed. The typical form that grows wild in the British Isles and the western fringes of mainland Europe is low-growing, prickly, bristly and suckering, with small, single, white flowers about 3.5 cm across and small leaves with 7 to 11 leaflets (sometimes only 5). The leaves often have an attractive blue-grey colour. The fruits, which are very characteristic, are normally rounded and such a dark purple colour that they appear black.



Black rounded fruits are typical of *Rosa spinosissima* but some forms have smooth fruit stalks and others have prickly or bristly fruit stalk



Detail of the young stem of a *Rosa spinosissima* cultivar showing the mixture of prickles and bristles



Some cultivars of *Rosa spinosissima* have brilliant autumn colour

In contrast, some cultivated forms of *R. spinosissima* have originally come from inland populations in mainland Europe and Asia. They include less bristly, taller growing forms with larger leaves and flowers that may be more than 7.5 cm across. These are *R. spinosissima* 'Grandiflora' types and include the form known as 'Altaica'. Most of the typical Scots Roses raised in the 19th century or earlier and still in cultivation have flowers that are only about 3.5 to 5 cm across. They were raised from the typical British and mainland Europe coastal fringe form of the species. The 20th century and later hybrids, such as 'Frühlingsgold', usually involved the 'Grandiflora' types and they have much larger flowers. These should not be called Scots Roses. They might be called *Spinosissima* Grandiflora Hybrids.



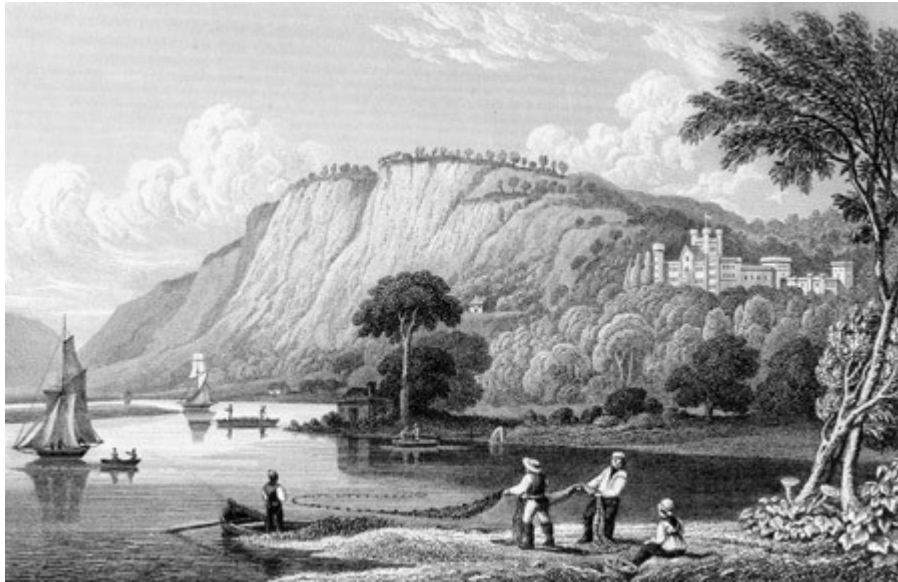
***Rosa spinosissima* 'Grandiflora' in the author's hillside garden in Shropshire, England**

Scots Roses flower profusely in April, May or June, depending on latitude and altitude, with single or double flowers that are usually sweetly scented. The flower colour can be white, cream, yellow, pink, red, purple or mauve, and some cultivars have marbled, striped or veined blooms. Most typical Scots Roses resemble the species from which they were derived, with small leaves and stems covered with narrow prickles and bristles. They extend by suckers (root-shoots) to form a mound of foliage and flower. Many of them produce attractive black, rounded fruits. Some also have good autumn foliage colour in shades of red, orange and yellow.

The first coloured variants of *R. spinosissima* were found in the wild in Scotland and described in the 17th century. I suspect that a double white form was cultivated in Scotland quite early and may even be one of the white roses associated with the Jacobites, who supported the restoration of the Stuart kings to the thrones of England, Scotland and Wales in the 18th century. However, I have found no reference to double forms of *R. spinosissima* in nursery catalogues before the early 19th century.

In 1822, Joseph Sabine, Secretary of the Horticultural Society of London, published

what has become the "official" account of the history of Double Scotch Roses in the *Transactions of the Horticultural Society of London*. In 1793, Robert Brown and his brother transplanted some of the wild Scots Roses from Kinnoull Hill, near Perth, Scotland, into their nursery, Dickson and Brown. One of these bore flowers slightly tinged with red, and a seedling raised from that plant bore flowers with more petals than normal. Through a repeated process of sowing seed and selecting from the seedlings, semi-double forms were obtained and they had eight good double cultivars to propagate and sell by 1803.



Kinnoull Hill, near Perth, Scotland c.1830 where Robert Brown collected *Rosa spinosissima* in 1793 and from which the first double Scots Roses originated. Generations of the author's ancestors were born, lived and worked near this spot. Some worked as Salmon Fishers on the River Tay for Lord Gray of Kinfauns Castle, like those shown in the engraving



A cultivar of *Rosa spinosissima* with the flowers 'tinged' with red - possibly similar to the form collected by Robert Brown on Kinnoull Hill

Robert Brown made these cultivars available to other nurseries including Robert Austin of Austin & McAslan in Glasgow who bred over 200 new double cultivars by the mid 1820s. An Austin & McAslan list of c.1825 has abbreviated descriptions and provides an indication of the range of colours that was available. Different shades of blush (pink) were the most common, along with white, cream, yellow, red and purple. These colours were combined in cultivars with marbled, striped and tinged flowers. Other British nurseries (often owned by or employing Scotsmen) also raised new cultivars. Lee of Hammersmith in London could offer some 300 varieties by 1830, but I have not been able to track down a catalogue of these varieties. Growers in France and other parts of Europe also raised new ones, but a smaller number than in Britain.

Scots Roses in North America

In North America, nurseries such as that of William Prince in Flushing, New York were selling only a small number of Scots Roses by the early 1820s. These had been imported from Britain. By 1829, the number of varieties sold by the William Prince nursery had increased in number to about 25 varieties.

Although there were probably never so many cultivars available in 19th century North America as in Britain and mainland Europe, nursery catalogues and accounts of horticultural shows in the United States indicate that they became increasingly popular during the 1820s and 1830s - at least in some areas. The nursery of Messrs. Winship of Boston, Massachusetts displayed 55 varieties of Scots Roses in 1831, and other nurseries or individuals from around Boston and Salem often displayed "Scotch Roses" at horticultural shows during the 1830s. Unfortunately, I have not found catalogues from the participating nurseries.

Scots Roses do not seem to have been as popular in the Philadelphia area as they were near Boston or New York. Buist stated in his book *The Rose Manual* (1844), "the original varieties of this rose are not esteemed by amateurs in this country. In my fifteen years practice as an American nurseryman I have not sold fifty plants of it; but recent hybrids have given them a tendency to bloom three or four times during the season, causing them to be more admired."

However, by the time that William Prince (William Robert Prince, son of William Prince) published his *Manual of Roses* and accompanying catalogue in 1846, he was offering over 40 Scots Roses, including some of the European varieties. He offered three repeat-flowering "Scotch Perpetuals" under "Damask Perpetuals" and included 'Harison's Yellow' in a section with forms of *R. foetida* (*R. lutea*) and other yellow roses rather than with "Scotch Roses" in spite of the fact that he listed other yellow Scots Roses with "Scotch Roses." William Prince gave notice of his intention to reduce the number of rose varieties of all the groups that he stocked after 1846, including some of the Scots Roses, and subsequent catalogues show a steady decline in the number of Scots Rose varieties that he offered.

A two-way connection between North America and Britain

James McNab, son of William McNab who was Superintendent of The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, was credited with introducing the rose called 'Hogg's Double Yellow' to Britain from America. In an account of his horticultural tour of North America in 1834 with eminent Perth nurseryman Robert Brown, McNab wrote that the tour's primary object was to satisfy Brown's desire to visit America after his retirement: "Mr Brown is a gentleman well known in the horticultural and agricultural world, from the many valuable acquisitions to the garden and the field which he has been the means of introducing. The admirers of double Scots Roses may be reminded, that these roses were first raised and brought into notice by him."

Brown and McNab's extensive tour of the United States and Canada included visits to the New York nurseries of William Prince and Thomas Hogg. 'Hogg's Double Yellow' (*Rosa Hoggii*) was added to the Edinburgh collection when they returned to Scotland. A few years later, Brown emigrated from Scotland to America and settled near Philadelphia where he died in 1846.

,I do not know if Brown took Scots Roses with him when he emigrated, but it seems probable that he did! Robert Buist, who had also worked at the Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, wrote two years before Robert Brown's death that "he still lives in the enjoyment of all his faculties, retaining at his advanced age much of his former originality of mind, and to him I am indebted for the communication of many practical facts, the result of his long and valuable experience." Buist himself was born in Fife, Scotland, in 1805 and emigrated to Philadelphia in 1828.

Botanic gardens and great estates

By the 1820s, The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh had assembled a substantial collection of well over one hundred varieties of Scots Rose and played a significant role in distributing them to botanic gardens and individuals around the world, including North America. However, neither The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh nor The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, which also had a large collection of Scots Roses in the 1820s, currently possess collections of Scots Roses. By the end of the 19th century, botanic gardens became more concerned with the cultivation and conservation of plant species rather than cultivars and hybrids.

Wealthy individuals in Scotland and other parts of Britain also built up large collections of Scots Roses on their estates. By 1830, the Duke of Bedford had created a *Rosarium Scoticum* at Woburn Abbey with about 260 different Scots Roses (James Forbes, his Head Gardener, was a Scot), and the Duke of Buccleuch had a collection of 150 at Dalkeith Palace near Edinburgh. At least part of the Dalkeith collection still existed in the early 20th century, but, unfortunately, none of the large 19th century collections have survived to the present day.

However, a 1917 edition of the *Bulletin of Popular Information of the Arnold Arboretum* in Boston, Massachusetts noted the fact that "a few years ago" the Arboretum had received a collection of Scotch Roses from the Duke of Buccleuch's

garden at Dalkeith Palace, near Edinburgh. At the time of writing, I have not been able to ascertain further details of the acquisition [since writing and submitting the article, I have found that only six cultivars were involved]. However, examination of the Arnold Arboretum's online *Living Plant Inventory* suggests that the collection has not survived to the present day. Only one old cultivar is listed that may have come from the Dalkeith collection.

Decline and renewal

Scots Roses began to lose popularity in Britain and North America after about 1840. It is generally said that this was due to the introduction of new repeat-flowering hybrid roses. However, I believe that the loss of some of the champions and main breeders of Scots Roses, such as Robert Austin who died in 1830, contributed to the decline in interest, which was reflected in a reduction of the number of varieties stocked by nurseries such as that of William Prince in New York.

By 1874, Shirley Hibberd wrote in *The Amateurs Rose Book* that "the varieties are only to be met with in old gardens, as they are all quite out of fashion." In 1902, Gertrude Jekyll wrote in *Roses for English Gardens* that "those who are interested in this class of Rose should inquire in the good old Scotch gardens, where no doubt fine forms still exist that have not come into trade."

Although the number of Scots Roses available from nurseries dwindled, some cultivars persisted as cottage garden plants. In Britain, Scandinavia and elsewhere, many people retained a special affection for them and their suckers made them easy to share with friends. In Finland, a double white cultivar is associated with midsummer celebrations. In Norway and Sweden, a double blush is the 'Husmodderose' (Housewife's Rose). Roses like these inspired much affection, and 19th and early 20th century immigrants to North America from Britain and Scandinavia carried pieces of Scots Roses with them. Those who travelled west across the United States from the East Coast also carried the "home grown" yellow Scots Roses with them.

Some immigrants, such as Dr Frank Skinner, an expatriate Scot in Canada, and others used *R. spinosissima* to raise hybrids that could cope with the extreme cold of Canadian winters. However, by that time, the 'Grandiflora' form 'Altaica' was available so that most of the new hybrids do not resemble Scots Roses. However, these 20th century roses have in their turn become endangered and the Saskatchewan Rose Society is trying to rediscover and reintroduce 'lost' Canadian hardy roses.

R. spinosissima 'Altaica' was used extensively in rose breeding in the 20th century. In Germany, Kordes raised the Frühlings cultivars, and more recently the species has been used as a parent in rose breeding in Finland where Scots Roses and *R. spinosissima* derivatives are very popular.

In Britain, various rose writers have tried to regenerate interest in the old Scots Rose cultivars over the years, including Edward Bunyard in *Old Garden Roses* (1936), Graham Stuart Thomas in *Shrub Roses of Today* (1962), Mary McMurtrie in *Scots*

Roses of Hedgerows and Wild Gardens (1998), and more recently, myself in various articles. In Finland, the late Aila Korhonen and the Finnish Rose Society have published well-illustrated booklets on the Scots Roses and their relatives in that country.

Sorting out the names

The naming of other *R. spinosissima* cultivars and hybrids in cultivation is confused and I hope to clarify the situation in a book I am writing on the history, nomenclature and cultivation of Scots Roses and their relatives. My research has identified the size of the problem in that I have compiled a list of about 1,000 cultivar names used in books, nursery catalogues and other publications from the 17th century to the present day. Where original descriptions are also available, they provide a basis for checking the names of those cultivars still in cultivation.

Many of the small number of Scots Roses that are currently available in commerce have names that are misleading because they are applied to more than one cultivar or they are incorrect. I think that, because such a small number of Scots Roses have been described in rose books published during the last hundred years, nurserymen and gardeners have been tempted to apply one of the few published names to the plants in their collections.

Several of the names applied to Scots Roses described in modern rose publications were not used before the 20th century, or were applied to different cultivars in earlier times. However, the practice of giving a new name to an old cultivar may be better than trying to apply an old name incorrectly, or using names such as Double White or Double Pink which are applied to numerous different semi-double and double forms. However, I admit that I often apply such names to my found, gifted or purchased roses but add the place or person from which it came in square brackets to make it a unique name (e.g., 'Double Pink' [Glenhighton] or 'Single Crimson' [McMurtrie]). This is a simple way of distinguishing between several different roses with the same name from different sources, until I can decide that they are actually the same as something else with a "good" name or deserve their own name!

Cultivars and hybrids in commerce

The number of *Rosa spinosissima* cultivars and hybrids readily available from nurseries today is a tiny fraction of those that could be purchased in the 19th century, despite the fact that those available today include hybrids raised in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The forms of *Rosa spinosissima* and its hybrids may be classified in a number of different ways. In previous articles I have suggested that *Spinosissimas* may be grouped as follows:

- Typical Scots Roses, which have small leaves very like those of the typical British *R. spinosissima*, with suckering stems covered with a mixture of prickles and bristles and normally growing up to about 1 m tall (sometimes

much less)

- Cultivars and close hybrids of *R. spinosissima* that, although they are not typical Scots Roses, are included in the term Scots Roses
- Other hybrids of *R. spinosissima*, that include simple species-like and complex hybrids but which are far removed from Scots Roses in appearance

This approach is a useful way of examining the similarities and differences within *Spinosissimas*, but in this article I will examine Scots Roses and other hybrids of *Rosa spinosissima* in groups according to the colour of the flowers. Although at first sight, this may seem a rather simplistic approach, it is one that has practical value for the gardener and is a useful way of examining the origins of cultivars named in this article and relationships between them.

White and cream-coloured Scots Roses

Included among white and cream-coloured Scots Roses are wild forms of *Rosa spinosissima* from different parts of its geographical range and some that have a hybrid origin.

Rosa spinosissima as sold by British nurseries may include the low-growing form that grows on sand dunes but, possibly more often, taller growing 'Grandiflora' types that may have been imported from European nurseries or grown from imported seed of Central European forms. The name *R. spinosissima* 'Grandiflora' covers cultivated variants of *R. spinosissima* with larger leaves and flowers than those of typical Scots Roses, and includes *R. spinosissima* 'Altaica'. They are also taller growing, often have fewer bristles and have a more upright arching habit than the coastal forms. Some definitely originate in Asia but other forms may come from parts of inland Europe.



Flowers of a wild British *R. spinosissima* and *R. spinosissima* 'Grandiflora'.
Some forms of 'Grandiflora' have even larger flowers.

Any of these British, mainland European or Asian plants might be styled '**Single White**' in a nursery catalogue but may show some yellow in the centre of the flower or even tend towards a cream colour. Seed-grown plants show considerable variation and *R. spinosissima* plants sold for hedges often comprise or include 'Grandiflora' forms that may grow to over 2 m. tall. *R. spinosissima* 'Grandiflora' and *R. spinosissima* 'Altaica' are often treated as being synonymous. However, although the Asian 'Altaica' is a 'Grandiflora' type, there are selected forms called 'Altaica' that are superior garden plants. Some 'Grandiflora' types may actually be hybrids and I have seen several forms that have a hint of *R. foetida* in their scent while otherwise looking like *R. spinosissima*.

***Rosa spinosissima* 'Hispidia'** is a name that covers a bristly-stemmed group of forms from Asia with larger, more cream coloured flowers than the typical western European form of the species. Plants that I have under this name have very shiny black fruits that are conspicuously broader than long. It has very good autumn colour. It is a very beautiful rose for much of the year, whether in flower or not.



***Rosa* 'Compactilla' growing as groundcover at the Europa-Rosarium, Sangerhausen, Germany**

'**Compactilla**' is a low growing single white cultivar used for ground-cover plantings in Europe. It may originate as a sand dune form. **Double White** is a name, sometimes styled as a cultivar name (i.e. '**Double White**') that is applied to numerous different semi-double and double forms. '**Dunwich Rose**', a name that is common in nursery lists, was a local name for the ordinary wild *R. spinosissima* in the region of Dunwich, Suffolk, England since at least the early 19th century. However, a 1917 account of the 'Dunwich Rose' by Viscount Dunwich describes this rose as a variety

having semi-double white flowers with a tinge of yellow, borne in groups of three. This latter characteristic indicates a hybrid as the flowers of *R. spinosissima* are borne solitarily. Therefore, the single-flowered rose sold under this name is not the 'Dunwich Rose' in this selective sense. However, as the single-flowered plant with this name in my collection does not set fruits, it is probably also a hybrid.

White flowered hybrids of *Rosa spinosissima* include simple species-like hybrids (*R. spinosissima* crossed with another species) and complex hybrids (*R. spinosissima* crossed with a hybrid rose). They do not have the characteristics of a typical Scots Rose. Coincidentally, two have an association with Canada. '**Louis Riel**', an attractive hybrid with *R. glauca*, combines the flowers of *R. spinosissima* and the bluish purple foliage of *R. glauca*. It was raised in Canada by Stanley Zubrowski in 1996. '**Paula Vapelle**' is a repeat flowering, double white rose raised in Belgium by Ivan Louette in 2002. Named after his mother, it is a hybrid between 'Stanwell Perpetual' and a wild collection of *R. spinosissima* from Brittany in France. It therefore has two portions of *R. spinosissima* in its parentage. 'Stanwell Perpetual' is described later with other pink-flowered roses. Louette immigrated to Canada. There are also a number of old double white *Spinosissimas* of European origin that appear to be complex hybrids because of their comparatively large flowers and a scent unlike that of *R. spinosissima*.



Louis Riel, a hybrid combining the flower of *R. spinosissima* and the foliage of *Rosa glauca*

Yellow Scots Roses

The well-known rose '**Harison's Yellow**' has a special significance in the history of Scots Roses in America. It was a home-grown rose, raised in about 1824 by George Folliott Harison (1777-1846), a New York attorney. Harison sold a plant of it to William Robert Prince in about 1830 in exchange for a new Camellia that Prince had imported from Britain. The rose was effectively a double yellow Scots Rose - a hybrid between *R. spinosissima* and *R. foetida*, but not recognised as such at the time.

The hybrid between *R. spinosissima* and *R. foetida* has been given the name **Rosa x harisonii** in honour of George Harison and his 'Harison's Yellow' but the hybrid probably arose in Britain before 'Harison's Yellow' because double yellow Scots Roses were in existence from the very early years of the 19th century, having been raised by Robert Brown in Perth and Robert Austin in Glasgow.

I am not certain which of the surviving double yellow Scots Rose cultivars is the true original 'Harison's Yellow'. The name 'Harison's Yellow' has been made famous as a rose that was carried across America by pioneer families and it is still found growing by deserted homesteads along the Oregon Trail. However, are all these roses the original 'Harison's Yellow'? I have not been able to explore the Pioneer Trail sites in person but photographs that I have seen of so-called 'Harison's Yellow' in America as well as plants sold under the name in Britain and mainland Europe seem to reveal that they are not all the same cultivar. I suspect that other varieties of *R. x harisonii* or seedlings of 'Harison's Yellow' itself may be involved. In Britain, gardeners and nurserymen have tended to apply one of a small number of names published in the 20th century rose books to any Scots Rose that they come across. Has this happened with 'Harison's Yellow' in North America? Has there been a tendency to name any double yellow *Spinosissima* within a certain range of parameters as 'Harison's Yellow'?

Hybrids similar to 'Harison's Yellow', were raised by Thomas Hogg of New York, Samuel Feast of Baltimore and possibly others. Seedlings were also raised from 'Harison's Yellow'. William Prince himself commented in 1846 that "numerous seedlings have been raised from this variety, but all that have come from under my notice have proved very similar, or inferior to it." It is possible that old plants of so-called 'Harison's Yellow' include seedlings from 'Harison's Yellow' or another variety.

I have not seen a contemporary (1830s) illustration of 'Harison's Yellow' but the variety '**Hogg's Double Yellow**' was described by Professor David Don and illustrated in colour in Sweet's *British Flower Garden* of 1838. This semi-double variety "was brought from New York by Mr. James McNab, who received it from Mr. Thomas Hogg, Nurseryman in that city, by whom the plant was raised from seeds of the single yellow rose [*R. foetida*], and it is known in the nurseries by the name of 'Hogg's yellow American rose'. It is a pretty variety, but it is surpassed in the fullness of its flowers, and in the richness of colouring by Williams's double yellow rose."



'Hogg's Double Yellow' from *The British Flower Garden* by Robert Sweet Vol. 4 (1838), courtesy the Arnold Arboretum Library

It has been suggested that 'Hogg's Double Yellow' was in fact 'Harison's Yellow' under another name and that James McNab had misunderstood its origin. However, the account seems clear and there is no reason why it should not have been another variety. Thomas Hogg was an expatriate Scot, born in Berwickshire, Scotland in 1778 and he emigrated to New York in 1820. His nursery catalogue of 1834 (the year in which James McNab and Robert Brown visited the nursery) listed five Scotch Roses and "Harrisonia" (Harisonii) but it does not include anything that could be 'Hogg's Double Yellow'. Hogg's seedling may not have been available for sale by that time but by 1843, Hovey and Co of Cambridge, near Boston, Massachusetts were selling "Double yellow Harrison" (fine yellow, double), "Hogg's Seedling Scotch" (double, pale yellow) and "Williams' double yellow" (bright yellow). However, the name of Hogg's plant is not in current use and both Robert Buist in his *Rose Manual* (1844) and Prince in his catalogue treat it as synonymous with 'Harison's Yellow'.

R. x harisonii **'Williams's Double Yellow'** (often called **'Williams Double Yellow'** today) was raised in about 1826, in Pitmaston, Worcestershire, England. I am not convinced that the plant currently sold as 'Williams Double Yellow' is the same plant as that originally given the name. A description by Professor David Don and colour illustration published in Sweet's *British Flower Garden* of 1836 shows a cultivar that is superior in flower form to the plant currently sold under the name. Although the

'William's Double Yellow' sold today is striking in colour and abundance of bloom, it has rather messy, poorly formed individual flowers with a green bud in the centre.



'Williams's Double Yellow' from *The British Flower Garden* by Robert Sweet Vol. 4 (1838), courtesy the Arnold Arboretum Library

Many other forms of *R. x harisonii* or seedlings of it are in cultivation today. Some of them are closer to *R. spinosissima* and others closer to *R. foetida*. Double yellow Scots Roses are common in old gardens in parts of Scotland, often forming a hedge in front of old cottages in country villages. Plants with the names '**Lutea**' and '**Lutea Maxima**' (both single), '**Harison's Yellow**', '**Williams Double Yellow**' and '**Old Double Yellow Scotch**' are the most readily available forms from nurseries in Britain, but I have seen other varieties in old gardens in Scotland.

Even more single, semi-double and double yellow cultivars are grown in Scandinavia, Finland and Germany, but some of these appear to be hybrids with 'Altaica' or other 'Grandiflora' types of *R. spinosissima*, unlike Scots Roses in habit .



A single form of *R. x harisonii*



**One of many single and double hybrids between *R. spinosissima* and *R. foetida*
(i.e. a form of *Rosa x harisonii*)**



A double form of *R. x harisonii* found by the author in Scotland

Some forms of *R. x harisonii* have a pleasant scent similar to that of *R. spinosissima*, while others have the less pleasant scent of *R. foetida*. Some are so close to *R. spinosissima* in appearance that they are only immediately distinguishable as *R. foetida* hybrids or seedlings of such hybrids by their scent.

Other yellow hybrids of *Rosa spinosissima* were raised in the 20th century using rose species newly introduced from Asia. These include '**Albert Edwards**', which is a hybrid of *R. spinosissima* 'Altaica' with *R. hugonis* that has single flowers of pale yellow (raised by Hillier Nurseries, Winchester, in 1938), and '**Helen Knight**', which is a hybrid of 'Altaica' with *R. ecae*, having single, bright yellow flowers (raised by Frank Knight at the RHS Garden Wisley in 1966 and named in 1978). '**Ormiston Roy**' is a hybrid with *R. xanthina* 'Allard'. It has single yellow flowers and unlike the other two, has something of the habit of a Scots Rose. It was raised in the Netherlands by Doorenbos in 1938. There are several other more complex hybrids that contain *R. spinosissima*, such as '**Frühlingsgold**' (raised by Kordes in Germany in 1937) and '**Aïcha**' (raised by Petersen in Denmark in 1966). These beautiful roses have a relatively small percentage of *R. spinosissima* genes ('Altaica' in these cases) compared with other roses that I have mentioned. They are large shrubs with large leaves and flowers. They bear no resemblance to the Scots Roses.

Pink, red and purple Scots Roses

These include hybrids between *R. spinosissima* and other native British species plus hybrids with *R. pendulina* or, possibly, with pre-existing complex coloured hybrids. These include several that could be said to be typical Scots Roses - with foliage and habit similar to the wild *R. spinosissima* of coastal Britain.



This fine semi-double pink was found by the author in Aberdeenshire, Scotland



One of several *Rosa spinosissima* cultivars in cultivation called 'Andrewsii'

'**Andrewsii**' is a name applied to several different pink, semi-double and double forms in cultivation, one of which was awarded the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Award of Garden Merit. '**Bicolor**' was a name applied, in the early 19th century, to a semi-double Scots Rose that was bicoloured in the same sense as *R. foetida* 'Bicolor', but the petals are purple on the front and white on back (see also 'Mary Queen of Scots'). There are cultivars given the name today that are very

different, with pink markings on white petals. The old meaning of the name should have priority. **'Dominie Samson'**, as sold in the United States, is a low growing cultivar with double marbled pink flowers. The original plant with this name was raised in the 19th century in Britain and named after a character in the novel *Guy Mannering* (1815) by Sir Walter Scott. However, in common with many other roses, the 19th century description is insufficiently detailed to be sure that the plant sold today is correctly named. **'Doorenbos Selection'** is a low growing cultivar with striking single crimson flowers that was apparently raised by Doorenbos in the Netherlands in the 20th century but I have not yet traced the details of its origin. This rose, which I have seen growing in California, has the characteristics of a true Scots Rose in its foliage, stems and fruits but I have not yet seen it in flower. **Double Blush** and **Double Pink** are names that are sometimes styled as cultivar names. They have been applied to numerous different semi-double and double forms. **'Falkland'** is an attractive double shell pink with greyish foliage and one of my favourite roses. **Marbled Pink** is another name that is applied to several pink single, semi-double and double forms in cultivation, some of which are more marbled in a true sense than others. **'Mary Queen of Scots'** as described by Graham Thomas in *Shrub Roses of Today* (1962) is a typical Scots Rose with distinctive white or grey buds opening to semi-double purple flowers with white backs to the petals. It is similar to the rose called 'Bicolor' in the early 19th century and I have not found the name 'Mary Queen of Scots' used before the 20th century. This semi-double rose, sometimes sold under the name **'Queen Mary'** by nurseries in Europe, is quite different from the single rose described by Peter Beales in *Classic Roses* (1997) - see the description of the *R. x reversa* group which is further on. **'William III'** is a name applied to several different deep pink to rich purple semi-double and double cultivars. I have not found the name used before the 20th century.



A semi-double blush Scots Rose that fades to white



One of the many 'Double Blush' cultivars.



A particularly good semi-double pink that will be called 'Glenhighton' after the garden of the late Iris Strachan near Peebles, Scotland who gave me propagating material



A semi-double marbled Scots Rose found by the author near Peebles, Scotland.



**Illustration of 'Bicolor' from *Roses: or a Monograph of the genus Rosa* by H. C. Andrews 1828.
courtesy RHS, Lindley Library, London.**



The bicoloured buds of one of the roses known by the name 'Mary Queen of Scots' - not to be confused with the cultivar of *Rosa x reversa* with the same name. 'Bicolor' in the 19th century use of the name



One of the Scots Roses known today as 'Bicolor' - very different to the 19th century use of the name



One of the cultivars known as 'William III' forming mounds of purple at Crathes Castle, Aberdeenshire, Scotland

I am not sure whether to include '**Single Cherry**' with this group of typical Scots Roses or with the following group. It is one of my favourite cultivars with its rich cherry-red, single flowers with paler backs to the petals (a single 'Bicolor') but it is not a completely typical Scots Rose. It does have the stems and black fruits of the species but the foliage looks as if another species is involved. Also, it often bears more than one flower at the end of each shoot, which suggests a hybrid origin. It is known as '**Red Nelly**' in Europe.

Some pink and red Scots Roses are even less 'typical' for one reason or another but are still treated as Scots Roses. They include a spectrum of forms rather than a closely defined assemblage.

The ***Rosa x hibernica*** group covers hybrids with *R. canina*. The hybrid was first recognised in Ireland in the early 19th century, hence the name. One cultivar has fairly large, single, pink flowers and looks more like *R. canina* than *R. spinosissima*. However, such hybrids have occurred more than once and there is more than one rose in commerce under the name. Roses of the section to which *R. canina* belongs produce very different hybrids depending on whether they are the pollen parent or the seed parent, and there are probably more Scots Roses with the same parentage but tending towards *R. spinosissima*.

The ***Rosa x reversa*** group covers hybrids with *R. pendulina*. They often have smooth or bristly reddish stems with few or no prickles, a taller more upright habit of growth, and less suckering. The crimson or pink flowers often have a white centre and elongated reddish fruits. Some variants have single, semi-double and double flowers.

They start to bloom slightly earlier in the season than other Scots Roses. Most cultivars of *R. x reversa* tend more towards *R. pendulina* than *R. spinosissima* in habit and lack the scent of the latter, but some do lean more towards *R. spinosissima*.



***Rosa* 'Glory of Edzell' is an early flowering hybrid**

'Glory of Edzell' is one of the first Scots Roses to flower in the spring. A mature plant gives the appearance of a cloud of pink butterflies when in bloom. The flowers are pink with a feathered star of white. The name **'Mary Queen of Scots'** is used by Peter Beales in his book *Classic Roses* (1997) for what seems to be a cultivar of *R. x reversa* with single pink flowers with irregular, darker pink shading and elongated, deep red fruits. This is quite different from the semi-double purple Scots Rose with this name described by Thomas (1962) and previously discussed. Unfortunately, it is the single-flowered plant that is normally sold by nurseries under the name 'Mary Queen of Scots'. However, the name as used by Graham Thomas has priority. Ideally, the name of this single flowered cultivar should be changed. It flowers early, at the same time as 'Glory of Edzell'. **'Mrs Colville'** is a name applied to several different single and semi-double cultivars having rich velvety crimson blooms with white centres. The glowing colour of these roses, which include some of my favourites, is particularly striking. They are probably cultivars of *R. x reversa*, and some tend more towards *R. spinosissima* in their habit and other characteristics than to *R. pendulina*, while for other cultivars it is the other way round. **'Poppius'** is an early flowering double pink cultivar of *R. x reversa* raised by Carl Stenberg in Sweden in about 1850. It is named after a Finnish botanist, Dr. Poppius.



The variant of *Rosa x reversa* called 'Mary, Queen of Scots' with single flowers is unlike the semi-double typical Scots Rose cultivar of the same name



One of the Scots Roses known by the name 'Mrs Colville' – one of several hybrids between *R. spinosissima* and *R. pendulina*

Pink or red complex hybrids of *Rosa spinosissima* bear little resemblance to Scots Roses. They include '**Lochinvar**', a repeat-flowering, double, pale pink *R. spinosissima* hybrid which was raised by David Austin in 2002, and '**Robbie Burns**', a single pink hybrid between 'Wife of Bath' and *R. spinosissima*, introduced by Austin in 1986. The old '**Stanwell Perpetual**', thought to be a hybrid between *R. spinosissima* and an Autumn Damask rose, was supposedly discovered as a self-sown

seedling in 1838. It is repeat-flowering, with pale pink double flowers that fade to white and a delicious scent - but not that of *R. spinosissima*. Unlike the other two, this hybrid would have involved the native form of *R. spinosissima* but this is not very apparent in its appearance. The pink and red Kordes hybrids such as '**Frühlingsmorgen**' (1942) and '**Frühlingszauber**' (1942), like others of the Frühlings Series, involved 'Altaica' in their breeding and are unrelated to Scots Roses in origin and appearance.



***Rosa* 'Stanwell Perpetual' has good scent and delicately coloured flowers that fade from pink to white**



***Rosa* 'Frühlingsduft' and other Frühlings roses have much larger flowers than true Scots Roses**

Conservation of Scots Roses and other Spinosissimas

I have been exploring old gardens in Scotland and elsewhere for some years, searching for surviving Scots Roses. Many of those in my own collection of about 300 cultivars and related hybrids have been propagated from plants in old gardens, while others have been obtained from nurseries or friends in Britain and other countries. The National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG) awarded my collection Full National Collection status in 2006. I have been proactive in conserving old varieties of Scots Roses, and this is probably the largest collection in the world.

To raise awareness of this group of roses and to encourage their conservation by private gardeners and those responsible for public collections, I have published a number of articles for specialist journals and gardening magazines in Britain, France, Germany, Finland and the United States. In addition, I am writing a book on the history, nomenclature and cultivation of Scots Roses and other Spinosissimas that aims to be a fully referenced definitive source of information for garden historians and rose lovers.

My research has allowed me to assist with the identification of Scots Roses and other 'Pimpinellifolias' at the Europa-Rosarium at Sangerhausen in Germany, at the Roseraie du Val-de-Marne at l'Haÿ-les-Roses near Paris in France, and elsewhere. This has revealed the fact that in some cases the name of an old rose variety has only survived on a label while the variety itself has been lost during the life of the garden concerned.



A grassy bank at the Europa-Rosarium, Sangerhausen, Germany planted with Spinosissimas

In Britain, hundreds of named varieties of Scots Rose were available in the 19th century. In North America, the numbers available commercially were smaller but the 19th century catalogues of William Prince and other nurserymen provide some indication of the cultivars that may still survive unrecognised in gardens and cemeteries there. However, immigrants from Scotland and other parts of Europe also introduced Scots Roses to North America, some of which may never have been available commercially. Adding to the complexity, some nurseries in Britain and America sold collections of mixed seedlings that never had names and some individuals raised varieties that never had recorded names. Self-sown seedlings appeared as well!

Therefore, it should not be assumed that it is possible to link a found variety with a 19th century name. However, some old cultivars that have not survived in Britain or mainland Europe may have survived in North American botanic gardens, private gardens, cemeteries and others sites. An individual Scots Rose surviving in an old garden may be the last example of a particular cultivar and therefore have a significance that may not be obvious. They are worth conserving, even if in many cases we may never know their original name! Several of the Scots Roses that I have found in old gardens and other sites in Britain are worthy of wider cultivation and some may even be superior to varieties currently in commerce. This may also be true of 'found' varieties in North America.

Scots Roses are significant and rather romantic survivals of a little-known historic horticultural phenomenon and fashion. Once the province of wealthy landowners, they became popular 'cottage garden plants'. Emigrants from Europe carried them across the world to help them feel at home in a new country. As the quotation from *Anne of Green Gables* suggests, the love of these roses stayed with such immigrants and their descendents until they "passed on to another land." However, Scots Roses are not just delightful souvenirs of the past. They are being rediscovered by today's gardeners because they have much to contribute to modern gardens and to the breeding of new disease-, drought- and cold-resistant scented roses.



Peter D.A. Boyd is the Collections Manager for Shrewsbury Museums Service in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England. He is also the representative for Northern Europe on the Heritage Rose Committee of the World Federation of Rose Societies. His personal collection of some 300 species and cultivars of Scots Roses has been awarded National Collection status by the UK's National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens. For more information on Scots Roses, visit www.peterboyd.com/scotsroses.htm. Besides his dedication to preserving and popularising Scots Roses, Mr. Boyd is also known for his research into Pteridomania and the life and work of Charles Darwin who was a native of Shrewsbury. He created the multidisciplinary Darwin Country website at <http://www.darwincountry.org/>.

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* Information on Peter D. A. Boyd's forthcoming book *

['Scots Roses, Rosa spinosissima and other Pimpinellifolias'](#)

See [Scots Roses and other Pimpinellifolias](#) for other papers on Scots Roses by Peter Boyd